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Description

The present invention relates to a shrink packaging material. More particularly, the present invention relates to a plastic packaging film prepared from a defined ethylene- α -olefin copolymer as a main component, which is excellent in heat shrinkability at relatively low temperature and little varying in thickness.

Heretofore known are such heat shrinkable films as polyvinyl chloride film, biaxially stretched polypropylene film, polyethylene film and so on. Among these films, polyethylene film is manufactured by the so-called inflation method in which a tubular film is extruded from a circular die and directly blown-up under gas pressure. This film, because of low production cost, high strength at the heat sealing joint and other advantages, has been widely used in shrink-wrapping applications.

The heat shrinkable polyethylene film produced by the inflation method, because of the very nature of the film-forming technique involved, has not been subjected to effective molecular orientation so that the film is inadequate in strength, high in elongation and shows a high rate of shrinkage only at high temperatures close to its melting point, thus being not fully satisfactory in such various properties as required for shrink packaging film.

The so-called irradiated polyethylene film which has been offered as an improvement over the above film in regard to the disadvantages just mentioned is a film which is obtainable by irradiating a polyethylene film with ionizing radiation so as to induce intermolecular crosslinking and, then, stretching the same. This irradiated polyethylene film has effects due to molecular orientation caused by stretching, showing increased strength and decreased elongation, for instance, but is disadvantageous in that it has a poor heat sealability, does not permit the reclamation and reuse of scraps, and is costly because of the radiation treatment required.

For the purpose of overcoming these disadvantages, the present inventors conducted a detailed study of the heat shrinkable polyethylene film from technical as well as material points of view and previously invented a heat shrinkable polyethylene film with improved heat shrinkability by orientation while retaining the desirable properties of polyethylene film such as good heat sealability and high impact resistance and a method for production of such heat shrinkable polyethylene film (United States Patent No. 4,354,997 and No. 4,463,153).

Unlike the so-called inflation-molded film, the film obtainable in accordance with this prior invention develops the shrinkage and shrinkage stress necessary for shrink packaging even at a temperature below its melting point to establish an intimate contact with the object being packaged but the technique is not necessarily satisfactory in tube stability during stretching operation and in the uniformity of stretching result with a large variation in thickness. Moreover, the orientation effect induced by stretching is not fully realized so that the low-temperature heat shrinkability of the film is still inadequate. Therefore, when the object to be packaged is one, such as raw meat, that is liable to undergo degradation at a relatively low temperature region of about 85° to 90°C, intimate shrink packaging results cannot be attained with such film.

In GB-A-2 097 324 a shrink film of ethylene- α -olefin copolymers is disclosed which is obtained by stretching biaxially a film made of a copolymer of ethylene with at least one C_3 - C_{18} α -olefin, which copolymer has two distinct crystallite melting points below 128°C, the difference between these melting points being at least 15°C, and stretching being carried within the temperature range defined by these melting points. The copolymer may be blended with a homopolymer of ethylene or copolymer of ethylene with an ethylenically unsaturated comonomer, which may constitute up to about 95 weight % of the blend.

In EP-A-0 057 238 an ethylene- α -olefin copolymer composition is disclosed which comprises a mixture of at least two ethylene-rich ethylene- α -olefin copolymers (A) and (B): (A) 95 to 45 wt % of a random copolymer between ethylene and a C_5 to C_{10} α -olefin, which has a melt index of 0.1 to 20g/10 min, a density of 0.910 to 0.940 g/cm³, a crystallinity of 40 to 70% (measured by X-ray analysis), a m.p. of 115 to 130°C, and an ethylene content of 94 to 99.5 mol%; and (B) 5 to 60 wt % of a random copolymer between ethylene and a C_3 to C_{10} α -olefin, which has a melt index of 0.1 to 50 g/10 min, a density of 0.870 to 0.900 g/cm³, a crystallinity of 5 to 40%, (measured by X-ray analysis), a m.p. of 40 to 100°C, and an ethylene content of 85 to 95 mol% which may be used for packaging films.

EP-A-0 104 097 discloses a composition of at least one ethylene polymer having a density between 0.91 and 0.94 and being polymerized by radical polymerization and at least one ethylene/ α -olefin copolymer. Such composition comprises 25 to 95 % by weight of the radical polymer having a fluidity between 0.15 and 3 dg/min and 5 to 75 % by weight of at least an ethylene/ α -olefin copolymer having at least 4 carbon atoms and a density between 0.905 and 0.940 and a fluidity between 0.4 and 3 dg/min. Such compositions are used for films having a thickness between 8 and 200 microns.

The above mentioned applications do not fulfill the requirements for heat shrinkable films as mentioned above.

It is an object of the invention to provide a heat shrinkable polyethylene film which is little varying in thickness and has a good heat shrinkability at low temperature.

5 This and other objects of the invention will become apparent from the description hereinafter.

The present invention provides a biaxially stretched, heat shrinkable ethylene polymer film having an area heat shrinkage of at least 20 % at 90°C and a thickness variation of not more than 20 %, said heat shrinkable ethylene polymer film being produced by stretching a film of a polymer mixture at least 2 times its original length in each of machine and transverse directions, said polymer mixture comprising (A) 90 to 10
10 50 % by weight of at least one linear copolymer of ethylene and 0.5 to 20 % by mole of α -olefin with 4 to 18 carbon atoms having a density of 0.90 to 0.93 g/cm³ at 25°C and a melt index of 0.2 to 3.0 g/10 min. and (B) 10 to 50 % by weight of at least one ethylene polymer having a density of 0.87 to 0.91 g/cm³ at 25°C and less than the density of the copolymer (A) by at least 0.014 g/cm³ and a melt index of 0.2 to 5.0 g/10 min, said polymer mixture indicating a differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) curve wherein an
15 endothermic area below the temperature lower than the melting temperature (main endothermic peak temperature) of the polymer mixture by 10°C accounts for at least 55 % of the total endothermic area, said area heat shrinkage being calculated by means of the equation:

$$\text{Area heat shrinkage (\%)} = 100 - A \times B$$

20 wherein A and B indicate the lengths (in cm) in the machine and transverse directions, respectively, of a square specimen of the shrinkable film, 10 cm x 10 cm, after the specimen is immersed in a glycerin bath maintained at 90°C for 10 seconds,

said thickness variation being calculated by means of the equation:

$$\text{Thickness variation (\%)} = \frac{T_{\max} - T_{\min}}{T} \times 100$$

30 wherein T_{max}, T_{min} and T indicate the maximum thickness, the minimum thickness and the average thickness, respectively, of the ethylene polymer film in the case that the thickness of the film in a tubular form is measured in the circumferential direction thereof.

35 The heat shrinkable ethylene polymer film is little varying in thickness and has an excellent heat shrinkability at low temperature.

In particular, when the above mixture is used as a starting material, a heat shrinkable film having a more excellent shrinkability at low temperature can be obtained. That is, a heat shrinkable film having an area heat shrinkage of not less than 15 % at 85°C, preferably a heat shrinkage of not less than 15 % at 85°C in
40 each of machine and transverse directions is obtained.

Fig. 1 is a schematic graph showing a differential scanning calorimetry curve of a polymer for explaining a manner of determining the endothermic area ratio defined above.

Fig. 2 is a schematic diagram showing a biaxial stretching apparatus used in the examples.

45 The polymer used in the present invention is the ethylene copolymer (A) mentioned below or a mixture of the copolymer (A) and the ethylene polymer (B) mentioned below.

The α -olefin which is copolymerized with ethylene for the production of the linear ethylene- α -olefin copolymer (A) to be used in the present invention is preferably α -olefins containing 4 to 18 carbon atoms, especially 4 to 8 carbon atoms. Examples of the α -olefin include butene-1, pentene-1, hexene-1, heptene-1, octene-1, 4-methylpentene-1, decene-1, undecene-1 and dodecene-1. The copolymerization reaction of
50 these comonomers can be carried out by a low or medium pressure method using a Ziegler-Natta catalyst.

The α -olefin content in the copolymer (A) is preferably in the range of 0.5 to 20 % by mole, particularly 0.5 to 10 % by mole.

An ethylene- α -olefin copolymer having a density of 0.90 to 0.93 g/cm³ at 25°C and a melt index of 0.2 to 3.0 g/10 min is preferably employed as the copolymer (A).

55 Those copolymers (A) may be used alone or as an admixture thereof.

The above-mentioned mixture of (A) a linear copolymer of ethylene and α -olefin having a density of 0.90 to 0.93 g/cm³ at 25°C and a melt index of 0.2 to 3.0 g/10 min. and (B) an ethylene polymer having a density of 0.87 to 0.91 g/cm³ at 25°C and less than the density of the copolymer (A) by at least 0.014

g/cm³ and a melt index of 0.2 to 5.0 g/10 min. gives a heat shrinkable film having a more excellent heat shrinkability at a low temperature such as 85°C.

When the difference in density between the copolymer (A) and the polymer (B) is less than 0.014 g/cm³, the blend effect of both polymers is insufficient, which results in poor heat shrinkability at low temperature.

A copolymer of ethylene and α -olefin containing 4 to 12 carbon atoms, particularly 4 to 8 carbon atoms and which has an α -olefin content of 0.5 to 10 % by mole is preferably employed as the copolymer (A) used in the mixture.

A copolymer of ethylene and α -olefin containing 4 to 8 carbon atoms and which has an α -olefin content of 5 to 20 % by mole is preferably employed as the ethylene polymer (B).

The polymer mixture is preferably a mixture of 90 to 50 % by weight of the copolymer (A) and 10 to 50 % by weight of the polymer (B). The polymer mixture is melted and extruded into a film which is then biaxially stretched to give a heat shrinkable film with an especially desirable heat shrinkability at low temperature. When the proportion of the polymer (B) is less than 10 % by weight, the resulting film is poor in heat shrinkability at low temperature. When the proportion of the polymer (B) is more than 50 % by weight, the resulting film is marked in blocking property so that the wound film cannot be smoothly unwound, which results in a poor operation efficiency, and, in particular case, undesirable phenomena such as blocking occur on the film surface, which results in poor commercial value. Further, the resulting film is poor in toughness, which results in poor in handling property.

The copolymer or copolymer mixture used in the practice of the present invention must indicate a differential scanning calorimetry curve (hereinafter referred to as "DSC curve") wherein the endothermic area under the temperature lower than the melting temperature (main endothermic peak temperature) of the copolymer or copolymer mixture by 10°C accounts for at least 55 % of the total endothermic area.

The definitions of the above measurements are explained by referring to Fig. 1 which is a schematic graph showing a DSC curve of a copolymer or a copolymer mixture. In Fig. 1, the curve A is DSC curve and the straight line B is a base line. The main endothermic peak in DSC curve is indicated by the arrow C.

Melting temperature:

The melting temperature is expressed in terms of main endothermic peak temperature T_1 corresponding to the main endothermic peak C.

Total endothermic area:

The total endothermic area S_1 means the area of the portion which is surrounded by the DSC curve A and the base line B.

Endothermic area below the temperature lower than the melting temperature (main endothermic peak temperature) by 10°C (hereinafter referred to as "endothermic area S_2 "):

The endothermic area S_2 is the area of the shadowed portion in Fig. 1. That is, the endothermic area S_2 means the area of a portion which is surrounded by the DSC curve A and the base line B and exists on the low-temperature side with respect to the temperature T_2 lower than the melting temperature T_1 by 10°C.

With a copolymer or copolymer mixture not meeting the above condition, the uniformity of stretching is not easily obtained. For example, if the stretching temperature is increased in order to assure the uniformity of stretching, the stability of stretching is adversely affected and the orientation effect does not develop well so that the low-temperature heat shrinkability is not as satisfactory as desired. In the case that the above condition is satisfied, uniform and stable stretching is possible without the need to limit the stretching temperature within a narrow temperature gradient range but selecting a stretching temperature from within a comparatively broad range below the temperature lower than the melting temperature of the copolymer or copolymer mixture by 10°C. Moreover, it is also possible to achieve a high orientation effect due to stretching so that the invention provides a practically useful heat shrinkable film with an area heat shrinkage of 20 % or more at 90°C, preferably an area heat shrinkage of 15 % or more at 85°C, more preferably a heat shrinkage of 15 % or more in each of machine and transverse directions at 85°C, and a thickness variation of not more than 20 %.

For the above-mentioned determination with a differential scanning calorimeter, 6 to 8 mg of a sample was sealed in an aluminum pan, heated in a nitrogen stream up to 190°C and held at this temperature for 1 hour. Thereafter, the temperature was reduced at a rate of about 10°C/min. down to room temperature and,

then, a DSC curve was recorded at a temperature increasing rate of 10°C/min. with a sensitivity of 25 mg/sec.

Within the range not detrimental to the objects of the present invention, high pressure polyethylene, ethylene-vinyl acetate copolymer, ionomers, ethylene-propylene copolymer, etc. can also be incorporated into the above copolymer or copolymer mixture.

In addition, such additives as lubricating agents, antiblocking agents, antistatic agents and antifogging agents can, of course, be incorporated for exploiting the respective useful properties.

Furthermore, since blocking tends to occur when the average density of the copolymer or copolymer mixture approaches 0.90 or drops below the level, it is then preferable to incorporate about 2,000 to 5,000 ppm of an antiblocking agent such as finely divided silica powder or higher fatty acid amide.

The production and stretching of a material film for use in accordance with the present invention can be carried out in the per se known manner, and will be explained below in detail taking the production and stretching of tubular film as an example.

First, the above-specified copolymer or copolymer mixture is melted by heating, kneaded and extruded into a tube which is then solidified by rapidly cooling to give a material film which is a substantially non-stretched film.

The tubular film thus obtained is fed to a tubular stretching equipment such as shown in Fig. 2, by which it is expanded and stretched and, at the same time, biaxially oriented in a temperature region where an effectively high degree of orientation is induced, for example, at a temperature lower than the melting temperature of the copolymer or copolymer mixture by 10°C or more, preferably at a temperature lower than said melting temperature by 20°C or more. The stretching ratio may not be the same for both machine and transverse directions but in order to assure satisfactory physical characteristics, it is desirable to use a stretching ratio of at least 2 and preferably at least 2.5 in each direction. The upper limit of the stretching ratio is usually 6 in each direction.

The film emerging from the stretching equipment can be annealed if necessary. This annealing helps control the spontaneous shrinkage of the film during storage.

The use of an ethylene polymer comprising at least one linear ethylene- α -olefin copolymer, the DSC curve of which shows that the endothermic area under the temperature lower than the melting temperature (main endothermic peak temperature) by 10°C is at least 55 % of the total endothermic area, permits stable stretching at a comparatively low temperature below the melting temperature of the ethylene polymer with the consequent decrease in film thickness variation and improvement in orientation effect, so that a superior heat shrinkable film with an excellent low-temperature heat shrinkability can be obtained stably.

Furthermore, the addition of an ultra-low density ethylene polymer with a density of not more than 0.910 g/cm³, which is not generally employed for the purpose, to the above-mentioned low density ethylene copolymer results in an excellent heat shrinkability even under lower temperature condition or moderate shrink conditions without losing other general physical properties required of packaging materials, so that the resulting film can be used satisfactorily for packaging products which cannot be heated to high temperatures.

The present invention is more specifically described and explained by means of the following Examples. It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to the Examples, and various change and modifications may be made in the invention without departing from the spirit and scope thereof.

The quantitative data given in the examples were determined by the following methods.

1. Shrinkage

A square specimen, 10 cm by 10 cm, was cut out of each sample film and immersed in a glycerin bath maintained at a given temperature for 10 seconds and the percent shrinkage were calculated by means of the following equation.

$$\text{Shrinkage in the machine direction (MD)(\%)} = \frac{10-A}{10} \times 100$$

$$\text{Shrinkage in the transverse direction (TD)(\%)} = \frac{10-B}{10} \times 100$$

$$\text{Area shrinkage (\%)} = 100 - A \times B$$

where A and B represent the lengths (in cm) in the machine and transverse directions, respectively, after immersion.

2. Thickness variation

Thickness of each tubular film in the circumferential direction thereof were recorded with a contact-type micrometer (Model K306C made by Anritsu Electric Co., Ltd.) at a full scale of 8 μm . From the obtained chart, the maximum thickness (T_{max}), minimum thickness (T_{min}), and average thickness (T) were determined. Then, thickness variation (%) was calculated by means of the following equation.

$$\frac{T_{\text{max}} - T_{\text{min}}}{T} \times 100$$

wherein T represents the arithmetic mean of readings at the chart positions corresponding to the intervals of 10 mm on the film sample.

The α -olefin content (% by mole) of the copolymers used in Examples was obtained as follows. The degree of branching per 100 carbons contained in the main chain of the copolymer was determined by IR analysis with using the following equation:

$$\text{Degree of branching} = 0.100 (K'_{1378} - 0.741 K'_{1303} - 2.6)$$

wherein K' =

$$\frac{1}{d \times L} \log \frac{I_0}{I}$$

d: the density of polymer,

L: the thickness of the sample,

I_0 : the intensity of incident light,

I: the intensity of transmitted light,

the values of K'_{1378} and K'_{1303} are values of K, obtained with respect to the absorption peak in the vicinity of 1378 cm^{-1} and the absorption peak in the vicinity of 1303 cm^{-1} , respectively. The α -olefin content (% by mole) was obtained by multiplying the degree of branching by 2.

Example 1

A mixture of 35 parts by weight of a linear low density polyethylene (ethylene-4-methylpentene-1 copolymer) with a melt index of 2.0 g/10 min., a density of 0.920 g/cm^3 at 25°C and a 4-methylpentene-1 content of 5 % by mole, 35 parts by weight of a linear low density polyethylene (ethylene-butene-1 copolymer) with a melt index of 0.8 g/10 min., a density of 0.923 g/cm^3 at 25°C and a butene-1 content of 6 % by mole and 30 parts by weight of an ultra-low density polyethylene (ethylene-butene-1 copolymer)

with a melt index of 1.9 g/10 min., a density of 0.904 g/cm³ at 25 °C and a butene-1 content of 10 % by mole was melted and kneaded at 200 ° to 250 °C and the melt was extruded in a downward direction from a circular die maintained at 250 °C. The DSC curve of this polymer mixture showed that the main peak temperature was 120 °C and the endothermic area under 110 °C accounted for 60.7 % of the total endothermic area. The slit diameter of the circular die was 75 mm and the slit gap was 0.8 mm. The molten tubular film thus extruded was cooled while guiding it over the outer surface of a cylindrical mandrel having an outer diameter of 66 mm as disposed just below the die and internally supplied with circulating cooling water at 20 °C, with the exterior surface of the film being passed through a water bath, to thereby give a tubular unstretched film with a diameter of about 65 mm and a thickness of 190 μm.

This unstretched film as the material film was guided to the biaxial stretching device illustrated in Fig. 1, where the material film 1 was expanded and stretched. The voltage and current of the circular infrared heaters of the preheater 4 were adjusted so that the film temperature at the exit of the preheater was kept at 65 °C.

The eight circular infrared heaters of the main heater 5 were grouped in 4 sections and the voltage and current of each section were adjusted. While an air stream was supplied along the outer surface of the tube from a cooling air ring 6 positioned below the main heater, a pressurized air was blown into the tubular film between low-speed nip rolls 2 and high-speed nip rolls 3. The pressure of the pressurized air and the relative peripheral speeds of the low-speed and high-speed nip rolls 2 and 3 were controlled so as to effect tubular stretching in a stretching ratio of 3 in each of the machine and transverse directions.

The thus stretched tubular film was collapsed through collapse rolls 7 and the nip rolls 3 and withdrawn in flattened form from the stretching apparatus and fed to a tubular annealing apparatus where the flattened film was again inflated with air and annealed for 10 seconds with a hot air blast at 75 °C from a heating cylinder and, then, cooled to room temperature through a cooling cylinder. The cooled film was collapsed again and taken up.

The resulting film had a thickness of 20.8 μm, a thickness variation of 12 %, heat shrinkages of 16.7 % and 18.0 % in machine and transverse directions, respectively, at 85 °C, and an area heat shrinkage of 31.7 % at 85 °C.

Using the above film, about 2 kg of raw broiler meat was pre-packaged. The pre-packaged product was passed through a commercially available tunnel heater for shrinking in which a hot air stream of 110 °C was available for about 5 seconds, whereupon the film was tightly wrapped around the meat. The broiler meat was not affected by this packaging process.

The seal portion and remaining portion of the package had sufficient strength, indicating that the packaging film of the present invention was excellent for practical purposes.

Various physical data inclusive of the above shrinkage data are shown in Table 1.

Example 2

A mixture of 70 parts by weight of the same linear low density polyethylene (ethylene-4-methylpentene-1 copolymer) as used in Example 1 and 30 parts by weight of an ultra-low density polyethylene (ethylene-4-methylpentene-1 copolymer) with a melt index of 0.8 g/10 min., a density of 0.906 g/cm³ at 25 °C and a 4-methylpentene-1 content of 5 % by mole was melted and kneaded to prepare a polymer mixture. The DSC curve of this mixture showed that the main peak temperature was 122 °C and the endothermic area under 112 °C was 63.1 % of the total endothermic area. In the same manner as Example 1, this polymer mixture was used to prepare an unstretched film which was then tubular-stretched 3 times in both machine and transverse directions and annealed at 75 °C to give a collapsed heat shrinkable film.

The resulting film had a thickness of 20.4 μm, a thickness variation of 8.5 %, heat shrinkages of 16.1 % and 16.8 % in machine and transverse directions, respectively, at 85 °C, and an area heat shrinkage of 30.2 % at 85 °C.

A loaf of raw beef, weighing about 2 kg, was pre-packaged with the above film and passed through a commercially available tunnel heater for shrinking in which a hot air stream at 90 °C was available for 10 seconds, whereupon the meat loaf was tightly packaged. The meat loaf itself showed no change.

Various physical values inclusive of the above-mentioned shrinkage data are given in Table 1.

Example 3

A mixture of 40 parts by weight of the same linear low density polyethylene (ethylene-4-methylpentene-1 copolymer) as used in Example 1, 40 parts by weight of the linear low density polyethylene (ethylene-butene-1 copolymer) as used in Example 1 and 20 parts by weight of an ultra-low density polyethylene

(ethylene-butene-1 copolymer) with a melt index of 3.6 g/10 min., a density of 0.88 g/cm³ at 25 °C and a butene-1 content of 15 % by mole was melted and kneaded to give a polymer mixture. In the same manner as Example 1, this polymer mixture was extruded to prepare an unstretched film which was then tubular-stretched 3 times in each of the machine and transverse directions and annealed at 70 °C to give a collapsed heat shrinkable film.

The DSC curve of the above polymer mixture showed that the main peak temperature was 122 °C and the endothermic area under 112 °C accounted for 60.5 % of the total endothermic area.

The resulting film had a thickness of 20.3 μm, a thickness variation of 9 %, and heat shrinkages of 18.2 % and 18.9 % in machine and transverse directions, respectively, at 85 °C, and an area heat shrinkage of 32.4 % at 85 °C.

Polystyrene bottles containing a Lactobacillus fermentation beverage, each measuring 75 mm in height and 40 mm in maximum diameter, were pre-packaged with the above film, 5 bottles per batch, and passed through a shrink tunnel heater at 100 °C for 3 seconds.

Despite this short shrinking treatment time, tight-fit packaging results could be obtained.

Various physical data inclusive of the above-mentioned shrinkage data are given in Table 1.

Example 4

The same procedures as in Example 1 except that a mixture of 70 parts by weight of a linear low density polyethylene (ethylene-octene-1 copolymer) with a melt index of 1.0 g/10 min., a density of 0.920 g/cm³ at 25 °C and an octene-1 content of 3 % by mole and 30 parts by weight of the same ultra-low density polyethylene as used in Example 2 was used were repeated to give a heat shrinkable film.

The DSC curve of the polymer mixture used showed that the main peak temperature was 121 °C and the endothermic area under 111 °C accounted for 62.5 % of the total endothermic area.

The thus obtained film had a thickness of 17.8 μm, a thickness variation of 14.5 %, heat shrinkages of 15.8 % and 16.1 % in machine and transverse directions, respectively, at 85 °C, and an area heat shrinkage of 29.4 % at 85 °C.

About 2 kg of dressed raw beef was prepackaged with the above film and passed through a commercially available shrink tunnel heater in which a hot air stream at 90 °C was available for 10 seconds. Just as in Example 2, the film was tightly shrunken on the beef. The surface of the beef also showed no apparent signs of change.

Various physical data inclusive of the above-mentioned shrinkage data are given in Table 1.

Example 5

To a mixture of 85 parts by weight of the same ultra-low density polyethylene as used in Example 2 and 15 parts by weight of the same ultra-low density polyethylene as used in Example 3 were added 3,500 ppm of a silica type antiblocking agent (available under the commercial name "Radiolite®F", Showa Kagaku Kabushiki Kaisha) and 1,200 ppm of erucic amide. In the same manner as Example 1, the above polymer mixture was extruded to prepare an unstretched film which was then tubular-stretched 3 times in each of machine and transverse directions and further annealed at 75 °C. After cooling, the tubular film was collapsed and taken up.

The DSC curve of the above polymer mixture showed that the main peak temperature was 123 °C and the endothermic area under 113 °C accounted for 61.3 % of the total endothermic area.

The resulting film had a thickness of 21.2 μm, heat shrinkages of 18.1 % and 18.6 % in machine and transverse directions, respectively, at 85 °C, and an area heat shrinkage of 33.3 % at 85 °C.

Raw broiler meat was shrink-packaged with the above film in the same manner as Example 1. The film was tightly fitted over the meat and the broiler meat also showed no apparent change.

Various physical data inclusive of the above shrinkage data are given in Table 1.

Ref. Example 6

An ethylene-butene-1 copolymer with a density of 0.922 g/cm³ at 25 °C, a melt index of 0.8 g/10 min. and a butene-1 content of 5 % by mole was melted and kneaded at 170 ° to 230 °C and extruded from a circular die kept at 230 °C. The DSC curve of the above polymer showed that the main peak temperature was 126 °C and the endothermic area under 116 °C accounted for 63.8 % of the total endothermic area. The extruded film was cooled as it was guided over the outer surface of a cylindrical mandrel internally supplied with circulating cooling water, with the external side being passed through a water bath, to give a

tubular unstretched film with a diameter of about 66 mm and a thickness of 250 μm . This unstretched film as the material film was fed to the biaxial stretching apparatus shown in Fig. 2 where it was stretched 4 times in both machine and transverse directions at 95° to 105°C. The stretched film was annealed with a tubular annealing apparatus using a hot air stream of 75°C for 10 seconds and, then, cooled to room temperature. The cooled film was collapsed and taken up.

The stability of the tube during stretching operation was satisfactory without a vertical dislocation of the stretching point or a swing of the tube, nor was observed an uneven stretching result such as necking. The stretched film had a thickness of 16 μm , an area heat shrinkage of 31.5 % at 90°C and a thickness variation of 15 %.

Pizza pies, 15 cm in diameter and about 1 cm in thickness, were pre-packaged with the above film and passed through a shrink tunnel heater with a hot air blast of 110°C for about 3 seconds. As a result, tightly-fitted packages were obtained, and the pies showed no change.

Ref. Example 7

An ethylene-octene-1 copolymer with a density of 0.917 g/cm³ at 25°C, a melt index of 2.3 g/10 min. and an octene-1 content of 3.5 % by mole was extruded and stretched in the same manner as in Example 6 except that the stretching temperature was set at 90° to 100°C. The DSC curve of the above copolymer showed that the main peak temperature was 121°C and the endothermic area under 111°C accounted for 57 % of the total endothermic area.

The stability of the tube during stretching operation was satisfactory without a vertical displacement of the stretching point or a swing of the tube, nor was observed an uneven stretching result.

The resulting stretched film had an average thickness of 16 μm , a thickness variation of 8 % and an area heat shrinkage of 27 % at 90°C.

Polystyrene bottles containing a Lactobacillus fermentation beverage, each measuring 75 mm in height and 40 mm in maximum diameter, were pre-packaged with the above film, 5 bottles per batch, and passed through a hot-wind shrink tunnel heater at 100°C for 3 seconds.

Despite the short shrinking treatment time, a satisfactory shrink-wrapped product was obtained.

Ref. Example 8

A mixture of 70 parts by weight of an ethylene-4-methylpentene-1 copolymer with a density of 0.925 g/cm³ at 25°C, a melt index of 1.0 g/10 min. and a 4-methylpentene-1 content of 3 % by mole and 30 parts by weight of an ethylene-butene-1 copolymer with a density of 0.923 g/cm³ at 25°C, a melt index of 0.8 g/10 min. and a butene-1 content of 5 % by mole was melted and kneaded at 170° to 230°C and extruded from a circular die maintained at 230°C. The DSC curve of the above copolymer mixture showed that the main peak temperature was 124°C and the endothermic area under 114°C accounted for 58.8% of the total endothermic area. The extruded film was guided and taken up as it was cooled over the outer surface of a cylindrical mandrel internally supplied with circulating cooling water, with the external side of the film being passed through a water bath, to thereby produce a tubular unstretched film with a diameter of about 66 mm and a thickness of 320 μm . This unstretched film was guided to a biaxial stretching apparatus, where it was stretched at 95° to 105°C 4.3 times in the machine direction and 3.8 times in the transverse direction. The film was then annealed at 75°C for 10 seconds and taken up in collapsed form.

The stability of the film during stretching operation was satisfactory without a vertical displacement of the stretching point or a swing of the tube, nor was observed an uneven stretching result such as necking, vertical cracking, etc.

The resulting film had an average thickness of 20 μm , a thickness variation of 10%, and an area heat shrinkage of 25.8% at 90°C. Shrink-packaging was carried out with this film in the same manner as Example 6. As a result, tightly-fitted packages were obtained and no change was found in the packaged product.

Comparative Example 1

An ethylene-butene-1 copolymer with a density of 0.918 g/cm³ at 25°C, a melt index of 1.0 g/10 min. and a butene-1 content of 3.5 % by mole was extruded, stretched and annealed in otherwise the same manner as in Example 6. The DSC curve of the copolymer showed that the main peak temperature was 120°C and the endothermic area under 110°C accounted for 49 % of the total endothermic area.

At the stretching temperature (95° to 105°C) used, the tube showed swinging and the necking phenomenon. When the stretching temperature was lowered in order to improve the stability of the tube, the necking became more pronounced to cause an increased unevenness. When the stretching temperature was increased to a range of 103° to 108° in order to suppress the necking phenomenon, the vertical displacement and swing of the tube were amplified to interfere with stretching stability.

The stretched film obtained at the stretching temperature of 103° to 108°C had an average thickness of 16 µm, a thickness variation of 27 %, and an area heat shrinkage of 15.4 % at 90°C.

This film was poor in flatness and not suitable for continuous packaging with an automatic packaging machine. Moreover, when the film was subjected to the same shrinking treatment as in Example 6, it failed to give a satisfactory package, showing many creases and raised areas. Although the packaged condition could be improved by increasing the tunnel temperature or the residence time in the tunnel, the product packaged underwent partial melting and deformation so that its market value was drastically reduced.

Comparative Example 2

A mixture of 60 parts by weight of an ethylene-hexene-1 copolymer with a density of 0.921 g/cm³ at 25°C, a melt index of 0.75 g/10 min. and a hexene-1 content of 4 % by mole and 40 parts by weight of an ethylene-octene-1 copolymer with a density of 0.920 g/cm³ at 25°C, a melt index of 1.0 g/10 min. and an octene-1 content of 3 % by mole was extruded, stretched and annealed under the same conditions as in Example 8. The DSC curve of the copolymer mixture used showed that the main peak temperature was 127°C and the endothermic area under 117°C accounted for 50.4 % of the total endothermic area.

The necking phenomenon in the stretched area was remarkable. When the stretching temperature was increased to a range of 105° to 112°C in order to suppress the necking phenomenon, the tube showed marked swinging so that no stable stretching result could be obtained.

The stretched film obtained at the stretching temperature of 105° to 112°C had an average thickness of 16 µm, a thickness variation of 23 %, and an area heat shrinkage value of 16.4 % at 90°C.

Table 1

	Ex. 1	Ex. 2	Ex. 3	Ex. 4	Ex. 5
Thickness (µm)	20.8	20.4	20.3	17.8	21.2
Thickness variation (%)	12.0	8.5	9	14.5	10.5
Haze (%)	3.4	3.8	2.7	2.8	5.0
Strength at break (kg/cm ²)	775	849	710	840	710
	635	638	600	640	540
Elongation at break (%)	220	208	210	230	240
	290	317	305	320	330
Heat shrinkage at 85°C (%)	16.7	16.1	18.2	15.8	18.1
	18.0	16.8	18.9	16.1	18.6
Area	31.7	30.2	32.4	29.4	33.3
Heat shrinkage at 100°C (%)	20.1	19.8	20.3	18.7	20.2
	22.7	22.2	23.0	21.7	23.0
Area	39.2	37.6	38.6	36.3	38.6
Seal strength (g/15 mm width)	1,300	1,330	1,020	1,500	970
	1,510	1,530	1,230	1,500	1,290
Melting temperature of polymer (main endothermic peak) (°C)	120	122	122	121	123
Endothermic area ratio (%) (Note)	60.7	63.1	60.5	62.5	61.3

Note: $\frac{\text{Endothermic area S2}}{\text{Total endothermic area S1}} \times 100$

- continued -

	Ref. Ex. 6	Ref. Ex. 7	Ref. Ex. 8	Com. Ex. 1	Com. Ex. 2
Thickness (μm)	16	16	20	16	16
Thickness variation (%)	15	8	10	27	23
Haze (%)	-	-	-	-	-
Strength at break (kg/cm ²)	-	-	-	-	-
MD	-	-	-	-	-
TD	-	-	-	-	-
Elongation at break (%)	-	-	-	-	-
MD	-	-	-	-	-
TD	-	-	-	-	-
Heat shrinkage at 85°C (%)	-	-	-	-	-
MD	-	-	-	-	-
TD	-	-	-	-	-
Area	-	-	-	-	-
Heat shrinkage at 90°C (%)	16.0	12.5	12.2	7.8	8.3
MD	18.4	16.6	15.5	8.2	8.8
TD	31.5	27.0	25.8	15.4	16.4
Area	-	-	-	-	-
Seal strength (g/15 mm width)	-	-	-	-	-
160°C	-	-	-	-	-
200°C	-	-	-	-	-
Melting temperature of polymer (main endothermic peak) (°C)	126	121	124	120	127
Endothermic area ratio (%)	63.8	57	58.8	49	50.4

Claims

1. A biaxially stretched, heat shrinkable ethylene polymer film having an area heat shrinkage of at least 20 % at 90 °C and a thickness variation of not more than 20 %, said heat shrinkable ethylene polymer film being produced by stretching a film of a polymer mixture at least 2 times its original length in each of

machine and transverse directions, said polymer mixture comprising (A) 90 to 50 % by weight of at least one linear copolymer of ethylene and 0.5 to 20 % by mole of α -olefin with 4 to 18 carbon atoms having a density of 0.90 to 0.93 g/cm³ at 25 °C and a melt index of 0.2 to 3.0 g/10 min. and (B) 10 to 50 % by weight of at least one ethylene polymer having a density of 0.87 to 0.91 g/cm³ at 25 °C and less than the density of the copolymer (A) by at least 0.014 g/cm³ and a melt index of 0.2 to 5.0 g/10 min, said polymer mixture indicating a differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) curve wherein an endothermic area below the temperature lower than the melting temperature (main endothermic peak temperature) of the polymer mixture by 10 °C accounts for at least 55 % of the total endothermic area, said area heat shrinkage being calculated by means of the equation;

$$\text{Area heat shrinkage (\%)} = 100 - A \times B$$

wherein A and B indicate the lengths (in cm) in the machine and transverse directions, respectively, of a square specimen of the shrinkable film, 10 cm x 10 cm, after the specimen is immersed in a glycerin bath maintained at 90 °C for 10 seconds, said thickness variation being calculated by means of the equation:

$$\text{Thickness variation (\%)} = \frac{T_{\max} - T_{\min}}{T} \times 100$$

wherein T_{max}, T_{min} and T indicate the maximum thickness, the minimum thickness and the average thickness, respectively, of the ethylene polymer film in the case that the thickness of the film in a tubular form is measured in the circumferential direction thereof.

2. The heat shrinkable ethylene polymer film of Claim 1, wherein said α -olefin is at least one member selected from the group consisting of butene-1, pentene-1, hexene-1, heptene-1, octene-1, 4-methylpentene-1, decene-1, undecene-1 and dodecene-1.
3. The heat shrinkable ethylene polymer film of any one of Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein said heat shrinkable film has an area heat shrinkage of at least 15 % at 85 °C.
4. The heat shrinkable ethylene polymer film of Claim 3, wherein said ethylene polymer (B) is a copolymer of ethylene and 5 to 20 % by mole of α -olefin, and the heat shrinkage of said film at 85 °C is at least 15 % in each of machine and transverse directions.

Patentansprüche

1. Biaxial gereckte, wärmeaufschumpfbare Ethylenpolymerfolie, die eine Flächenwärmeschrumpfung von mindestens 20% bei 90 °C und eine Veränderung der Dicke von nicht mehr als 20% aufweist, wobei die wärmeaufschumpfbare Ethylenpolymerfolie durch Recken einer Folie aus einem Polymergemisch jeweils in Maschinenrichtung und in Querrichtung auf mindestens das Zweifache ihrer ursprünglichen Länge hergestellt wird, wobei das Polymergemisch umfaßt (A) 90 bis 50 Gew.-% von mindestens einem linearen Copolymer von Ethylen und 0,5 bis 20 Mol-% eines α -Olefins mit 4 bis 18 Kohlenstoffatomen, das eine Dichte von 0,90 bis 0,93 g/cm³ bei 25 °C und einen Schmelzflußindex von 0,2 bis 3,0 g/10 Min. aufweist und (B) 10 bis 50 Gew.-% mindestens eines Ethylenpolymeren, das eine Dichte von 0,87 bis 0,91 g/cm³ bei 25 °C aufweist, und dessen Dichte um mindestens 0,014 g/cm³ geringer ist als die Dichte des Copolymers (A) und das einen Schmelzflußindex von 0,2 bis 5,0 g/10 Min. aufweist, wobei das Polymergemisch eine Differential-Scanning-Calorimetrie-Kurve (DSC-Kurve) beschreibt, worin ein endothermer Bereich unterhalb der Temperatur, die um 10 °C niedriger ist als die Schmelztemperatur (Temperatur des endothermen Hauptpeaks) des Polymergemisches mindestens 55% der gesamten endothermen Fläche beträgt, wobei die Flächenwärmeschrumpfung mittels der Gleichung berechnet wird:

$$\text{Flächenwärmeschrumpfung (\%)} = 100 - A \times B$$

worin A und B jeweils die Längen (in cm) in den Maschinen- und den Querrichtungen einer quadratischen Probe der schrumpfbaren Folie angeben, 10 cm x 10 cm, nachdem die Probe in ein bei 90 ° C gehaltenes Glycerinbad 10 Minuten lang eingetaucht wurde, wobei die Veränderung der Dicke mittels der Gleichung berechnet wird:

$$\text{Veränderung der Dicke (\%)} = \frac{T_{\text{max}} - T_{\text{min}}}{T} \times 100$$

worin T_{max}, T_{min} und T jeweils die maximale Dicke, die minimale Dicke und die durchschnittliche Dicke der Ethylenpolymerfolie in dem Fall angeben, daß die Dicke der Folie in einer Schlauchform in der Richtung ihres Umfangs gemessen wird.

2. Wärmeaufschrumpfbare Ethylenpolymerfolie nach Anspruch 1, wobei das α-Olefin mindestens ein Element ausgewählt aus der Gruppe bestehend aus Buten-1, Penten-1, Hexen-1, Hepten-1, Okten-1, 4-Methylpenten-1, Decen-1, Undecen-1 und Dodecen-1 ist.
3. Wärmeaufschrumpfbare Ethylenpolymerfolie nach einem der Ansprüche 1 oder 2, wobei die wärmeaufschrumpfbare Folie eine Flächenwärmeschrumpfung von mindestens 15% bei 85 ° C aufweist.
4. Wärmeaufschrumpfbare Ethylenpolymerfolie nach Anspruch 3, wobei das Ethylenpolymer (B) ein Copolymer aus Ethylen und 5 bis 20 Mol-% eines α-Olefins ist und die Wärmeschrumpfung der Folie bei 85 ° C jeweils in Maschinen- und Querrichtung mindestens 15% beträgt.

Revendications

1. Film de polymère de l'éthylène étiré biaxialement, thermorétractable, ayant un retrait thermique en surface d'au moins 20 % à 90 ° C et une variation de l'épaisseur non supérieure à 20 %, ce film de polymère de l'éthylène thermorétractable étant fabriqué en étirant un film d'un mélange de polymères à au moins deux fois sa longueur initiale dans chacun des sens machine et travers, ce mélange de polymères comprenant (A) 90 à 50 % en poids d'au moins un copolymère linéaire de l'éthylène et 0,5 à 20 % en moles d'une α-oléfine en C₄ à C₁₈ ayant une densité de 0,90 à 0,93 g/cm³ à 25 ° C et un indice de fusion de 0,2 à 3,0 g/10 minutes et (B) 10 à 50 % en poids d'au moins un polymère de l'éthylène ayant une densité de 0,87 à 0,91 g/cm³ à 25 ° C et une densité inférieure à celle du copolymère (A) d'au moins 0,014 g/cm³ et un indice de fusion de 0,2 à 5,0 g/10 minutes, ce mélange de polymères ayant une courbe de calorimétrie différentielle à balayage (DSC) dans laquelle la région endothermique au-dessous de la température inférieure de 10 ° C à la température de fusion (température de pic endothermique principal) du mélange de polymères représente au moins 55 % de la région endothermique totale, ce retrait thermique en surface étant calculé par l'équation :

$$\text{Retrait thermique en surface (\%)} = 100 - A \times B$$

dans laquelle A et B indiquent les longueurs (en cm) dans le sens machine et le sens travers, respectivement, d'un échantillon carré du film rétractable de 10 cm x 10 cm, après avoir plongé l'échantillon dans un bain de glycérine maintenu à 90 ° C pendant 10 secondes, cette variation d'épaisseur étant calculée par l'équation :

$$\text{Variation d'épaisseur (\%)} = \frac{T_{\text{max}} - T_{\text{min}}}{T} \times 100$$

dans laquelle T_{max}, T_{min} et T indiquent l'épaisseur maximale, l'épaisseur minimale et l'épaisseur moyenne, respectivement, du film de polymère de l'éthylène dans le cas où l'épaisseur du film sous forme tubulaire est mesurée dans le sens circonférentiel de celui-ci.

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2. Film de polymère de l'éthylène thermorétractable selon la revendication 1, dans lequel cette α -oléfine est au moins un membre choisi dans le groupe constitué du butène-1, le pentène-1, l'hexène-1, l'heptène-1, l'octène-1, le 4-méthylpentène-1, le décène-1, l'undécène-1 et le dodécène-1.
- 5 3. Film de polymère de l'éthylène thermorétractable selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 ou 2, dans lequel ce film thermorétractable a un retrait thermique en surface d'au moins 15 % à 85 °C.
- 10 4. Film de polymère de l'éthylène thermorétractable selon la revendication 3, dans lequel ce polymère de l'éthylène (B) est un copolymère de l'éthylène et de 5 à 20 % en mole d'une α -oléfine, et le retrait thermique de ce film à 85 °C est d'au moins 15 % dans chacun des sens machine et travers.

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FIG. 1

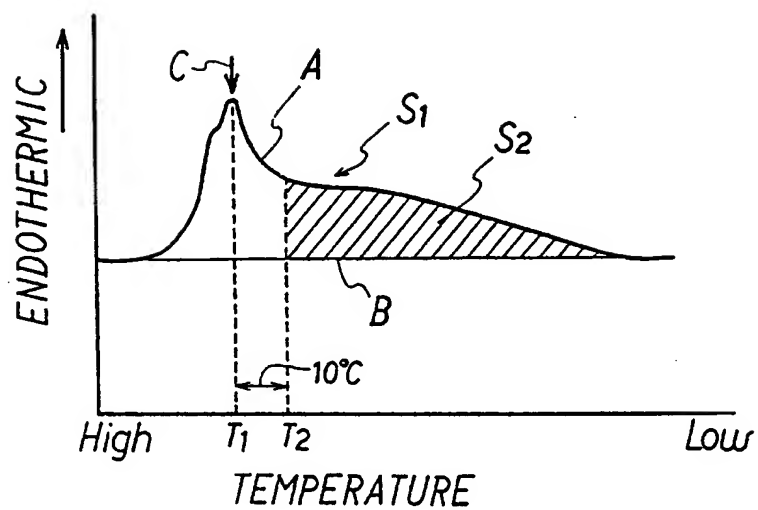


FIG. 2

